

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Gardiner Greene Hubbard, April 17, 1894, with transcript

MBell asks me to send you this copy of a note he has sent Mr. Hubbard in from him. Beinn Bhreagh. COPY. Victoria County Nova Scotia, Canada. April 17th. 1894. Dear Mr. Hubbard;—

I wish to goodness I was not a member of the Board of Directors for I feel like a fish out of water when we come to business questions like those which we are now discussing. We need your cool head and clear judgment now if ever. If you think it best to call a meeting of the Board now to consider the Overture — why not do so — or telegraph President Gillett to do so. In his absence, if you cannot reason him quickly, why should you not as first Vice-President, in his absence issue a call. So far as I am able to judge of the situation — it seems to me that it is not so important to settle the question of the Overture, as to adopt the amendments to the Constitution approved at our last meeting. That is the first thing. I thought it was arranged at the Phila. meeting — that these amendments would be gone over very carefully by you and Mr. Lyon, and that then a special meeting of the Association would be called to meet at Rochester to approve them — votes being taken when desired by proxy. Why not carry out this plan — and call a meeting of the Board at the same time — to consider Overture and settle all details of Summer Meeting. You know a great deal more of these matters than I do — and I am perfectly willing to do what you think best.

The Overture is addressed to “The President and Directors” of the A. A. P. T. S. D., and not to the Association itself — although Pres. Gallaudet claims in the Annals for April p. 129 that it was addressed to the Association “and not merely to the President and Directors as 2 a Board”. In a letter from him, however, in his own hand -writing which is now before me dated Dec. 13th. 1893 he refers to “the Overture of our Executive Committee to the President and Directors of the A. A. P. t . S. D.” So long then as the

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Overture has not been finally acted upon by us he can have no right to bring it before the Association independently of us. Should the Board see fit to reject it at the present time would he not then have a right as a member of the Association, to bring the matter before the Association himself? So long as we have not acted he cannot take it out of our hands. My idea would be to act upon it very shortly before the Summer Meeting and take the grounds that we do not think it advisable to have the Association discuss the subject until after the Convention of American Instructors has itself discussed the matter. It concerns the very existence of the Convention — and we cannot therefore presume to decide it — or even submit it to the Association for its consideration — until the members of the Convention have had the fullest opportunity of discussing it — more especially as members of the Convention have publicly disapproved of the proposition. The Convention had only a formal meeting in Chicago — a mere handful of the members being present — and there was no discussion of the matter at all. Would not this be showing courtesy to the members of the Convention — and at the same time give us time to strengthen our position by adopting the new amendments to the Constitution.

How would it do to have a Board Meeting now — and decide matter on these lines — and then have the Board issue a call for special meeting of the Association at Rochester to act on 3 Constitution. I look to you for guidance: President Gillett is headed for Montreal and the Maritime Provinces. I telegraphed him a few days ago to come here if possible. Have not heard from him yet. Let me know what you decide upon.

I think Miss Yale is mistaken in supposing that any of the gentlemen members of the Board thought for one moment of giving up the Practice School feature — the most valuable feature of our meetings. On the contrary — at least that is my recollection — we thought it to be so valuable and so important — that we wished to extend it — by inviting a larger number of schools to show us the practical working of their methods of teaching — by the actual exhibition of pupils — and demonstration, by actual instruction before the members of the processes employed in the schools. The actual presence of pupils has always been recognized by me as important — and to such an extent — that I have paid

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out of my own pocket the expenses of many if not most of the pupils that have appeared before us. It had been my intention to offer my help to any schools that were unable, from pecuniary reasons, to send pupils to Chautauqua but I am not aware that I have expressed this intention to any one. I don't know where Miss Yale obtained her information that I proposed to help the Garrett Home. It was certainly my intention to write and find out whether Miss Garrett needed help — but I have not done so yet ! It would be much better for the Association itself to assist all pupils that are brought — and I have telegraphed to Mr. Crouter that I will back the Association up to any reasonable extent in this matter — so long as he doesn't ruin me! and limiting my contribution so that it shall not exceed one thousand dollars.

The thing that worries me is the unsatisfactory condition of our Constitution. If we can remedy that in the manner provided for at our Philadelphia meeting — we could leave the Overture to take care of itself. The only thing I am anxious about is that it should not come before the Association for discussion until after the amended Constitution has been adopted.

We should, I think, give some attention just now to the names of the three Directors to be elected — at the Summer Meeting. If I remember rightly I am one of the members whose term of office expires. If so — I propose to decline re-election as the responsibility of a Director is distasteful to me — I am unfitted both by inclination and ability to sit upon a Board. The Association is strong enough to get along without me upon the Board; and if the amended Constitution is adopted — I have no fear for the future. All who know me will know that I shall work for the Association just as much off the Board as on; and I believe things will be better managed by the Board when I am off — for then things will not be left to me to do. So long as I am on the Board the Directors will lean on me — a broken reed I am afraid. They will be stronger and more self-reliant without me. I shall be happier too myself — and shall be proud indeed to see that my child can walk alone, and make its way in the world by itself.

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Your loving son, Signed. Alec.